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Gender Perception Differences for Relationships Portrayed on Television

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Abstract

Television and other media influence expectations and perceptions of love and marriage. In this experiment, various gender behaviors of sex and relationships were shown in the context of romantic relationships on television. Participants' interest, character approval, and perceived realism were compared between expected and not-expected gender behavior for white and black television characters. The results indicate that, in general, characters are seen as less real, and receive lower approval ratings, when expected gender behavior is violated. However, male participants may have different perceptions regarding television characters than female participants due to the genre through which romantic relationships are shown on television. These findings contribute to previous research that preconceived gender expectations affect how we perceive and define gender roles in both television shows and reality.

Gender Perception Differences for Relationships Portrayed On Television

Relationships form an essential component in every human life. Satisfaction in romantic relationships and friendships affects overall life happiness and satisfaction levels (Myers, 1993). All humans experience various types of relationships over the course of a lifetime. Some relationships are long term and emotionally meaningful, such as a parent-child or husband-wife relationship. Other forms of relationships may be shorter in endurance and less significant, such as summer love soon forgotten. Some relationship experiences, such as casual sex, could potentially lead to either a long term, meaningful relationship, or something substantially less noteworthy.

Television and other media influence the expectations and perceptions of love and marriage (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). However, television and film often depict unrealistic representations of sex, love, and relationships. Such impractical ideas about relationships can lead to idealized views regarding love and marriage, which can contribute to marital dissatisfaction and ultimately an elevated divorce rate. Idealized beliefs regarding romantic love and marriage, which persist despite personal experiences, have been attributed to idealizations of romance in film (Lockhart, 2000). In addition to unrealistic portrayals of committed relationships, television often depicts casual sex with varying degrees of realism.

A plethora of research cites ways in which men and women differ in wants, perceptions, and views on love, sex, and relationships. But how do men and women perceive the relationships portrayed on television? Do they scrutinize one gender differently than another? Do they evaluate the relationships on television as realistic

portrayals? Given that television portrayals affect perceptions of love (Eggermont, 2004), perceived realism of love and sex on television poses an important consideration.

In this study, participants read fictional television summaries depicting aspects of relationships where expected behavior differs between genders. Four relationships aspects were examined: attitudes regarding casual sex, dissatisfaction complaints in a relationship, behavior exhibited in disagreements with partner, and characteristics desired in a date compared to a spouse. Four television episode stories were created, with one item assigned to each episode. The participants were asked to rate approval and realism of character behavior, as well as realism and interest in the overall television episode. This study examines perception differences between men and women affected by story characters' gender, expected or not expected gender behavior, and race.

Literature Review

All individuals, irrespective of gender, possess conceptions about love, romance, and romantic partner expectations. Romantic conceptions affect interpretations of romantic experiences (Coates, 1999; Feiring, 1999; Furmon & Simon, 1999; Eggermont, 2004). Furmon and Simon's Model (1999) argues that four factors influence how individuals develop beliefs about romantic conceptions: parent-child relationships, friendships with peers, actual experiences with romantic partners, and cultural influences and broad social attitudes. Men and women do hold some similar ideas about romance. However, men and women have notable differences in their romance views. This could stem from gender differences in the four influencing factors suggested by Furmon and Simon's Model. For instance, women reported greater disapproval of casual sex from their parents than men did, as well as less approval from their peers than men did

(Daniels, 2002). Both parent and peer relationships, two of the four factors influencing romantic beliefs (Furmon & Simon 1999) apply different standards toward women than men. Given the different influencing attitudes applied to women compared to their male counterparts, it's reasonable that women are less likely to engage in casual sex than men and also give lower approval of casual sex than men (Daniels, 2002). When women do engage in casual sex, their actions receive more disapproval from peers and parents than when men engage in the same activities.

Since men and women develop different conceptions about romance, their beliefs differ on many specific issues about romantic experiences. Factors needed for relationship satisfaction differ between genders. Men cite balance between commitment and independence as an important factor for relationship satisfaction, whereas women prioritize romantic passion and open communication (Yela, 2000). The genders also hold different requirements before engaging in sexual acts. Women, significantly more than men, require emotional commitment and the state of "being in love" before engaging in sexual acts (Taris, 1997). Some women will engage in casual sex, but usually with hopes of the encounter leading to an emotional bond and commitment (Regan, 1999). As mentioned previously, women are less likely to engage in casual sex than men, and are also less approving of women engaging in casual sex than men (Daniels, 2002). Men, on the other hand, report engaging in casual sex for physical pleasure (Regan, 1999) without intentions or hopes for a long term commitment. Men's openness towards casual sex may be due to the fact that societal judgments and repercussions towards casual sex are much less severe for men than women.

Women and men also see different factors as important for romantic relationship satisfaction. Women rate dissatisfaction with their partner's personality and performance as a financial provider much higher than disappointment in their partner's physical appearance. In contrast, men most often cite losing sexual interest due to disappointment in partner's physical appearance and do not complain about their partner's mediocre performance as a financial provider (Yulia, 2002). These expectations follow stereotypical gender roles: men are expected to be providers, and women are expected to be physically appealing. These stereotypes, created and enforced by media, perpetuate unrealistic expectations that can lead to partner dissatisfaction. These stereotypes are present in media throughout one's lifetime, beginning in early childhood. Disney fairytales watched from a young age influence perception of expected gender roles in marriage (Lockhart, 2000). Fairytales focus on men as strong, charming, and brave princes and heroes; whereas the more docile female assumes the role of the "beautiful princess." In adulthood real life expectations, charming hero translates to "provider" and "personality" for men, and beautiful princess translates to "expected physical attractiveness" for women.

Conflict in romantic relationships is also seen differently based on gender. Males believe that "disagreement is destructive" significantly more than females (Bushman, 1999). For females, giving critical responses to their partner's actions is positively related to satisfaction level (Bushman, 1999). Perhaps women need to express their frustrations verbally, whereas men prefer to side step such verbal conflict situations.

The characteristics needed from a spouse compared to a date also differ between men and women. Women put stronger emphasis on psychological characteristics than

men do. Additionally, women seek similar characteristics for both a husband and a date. In contrast, men view characteristics for a date compared to a wife very differently. A date is seen as a companion without much commitment, whereas a wife is seen as a combination of a nurturing object and a sex object (Basu, 2000).

Overall, society offers different rules of behavior for two genders. Additionally, men and women possess different perceptions and notions concerning romance. These beliefs are influenced by media. Idealized beliefs regarding romantic love and marriage, which persist despite personal experiences, have been attributed to idealizations of romance in film (Lockhart, 2000). Such unrealistic values towards romance create strong gender role expectations that can be difficult to completely fulfill.

Additionally, television programming plays a role in developing an individual's ideas concerning sex and relationships. Approximately two-thirds of television programs contain sexual content, programs with sexual content average 4.4 scenes with sexually related material per hour, and one in every seven programs includes either an implied or depicted portrayal of sexual intercourse (Kunkel, Eyal, & Bieleley, 2003). Due to such high levels of sexual content, it's reasonable to expect that people's schemas about sex are influenced by television. Since ideas and schemas are affected, in turn, actions are affected. The high volume of sexual content on television may lead the public to believe that sex is more common than it is in reality, and may create cultural norms based on unrealistic television. This can lead to the likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse as well as hastening adolescents' sexual activity (Brown et al., 2006). Social learning theory (Schiff, 1999) predicts that observation of sexual talk or behavior (mediated or unmediated) will influence the decision to have sex as long as the consequences of the

sexual action are not negative. Thus, simply viewing sexual events or discussion on television could create beliefs which influence behavior.

People are constantly exposed to film and television versions of love and relationships. Such portrayals vary in degrees of realism, ranging from Disney's fairytale ideals of love to sexual liberalism in HBO's hit show *Sex and the City*. Individuals have cited such fairytale depictions of love as important factors in beliefs and expectations about romantic love which, when unsatisfied, can result in disappointment (Lockhart, 2000). Women are more affected by beliefs about romantic love and marriage, and these elements are more influential in the lives of women than men (Lockhart, 2000).

Television viewing can also strengthen preexisting ideas. For example, all men and women hold expectations in a romantic partner. However, television viewing increases romantic partner expectations (Eggermont, 2004). For example, physical attractiveness in a partner is important to all males, but television viewing strengthens this idea. Additionally, both genders raise higher expectations of partner's personality qualities when television viewing increases (Eggermont, 2004). Television and film messages influence ideals about romantic relationships – even if the ideals are unrealistic or problematic (Galician, 1999). Media manipulation of images has altered views of love and diminished erotic love to the mundane (Mosconi, 2004). This can result in real life relationships facing difficulties or possibly termination of the relationship due to the couple's unrealistic and differing perceptions of what is and is not common and realistic in a relationship. Given that the media is one factor among many that affect sexual attitudes and behavior, individuals develop complex schemas about love and sex influenced by a myriad of factors including life experiences, gender roles, cultural

expectations, and childhood upbringing. Thus, individuals should perceive the realism of a television portrayal of a romantic encounter based on their personal views. Television episodes should be seen as more real if they align with expected gender behavior. They also make social judgments of approval of the behavior the television characters exhibit. Because of this, when an individual judges the behavior a television character, he judges the character's behavior in terms of approval and realism in the same manner he judges real life. By creating television episode stories that target expected gender behavior differences it is possible to measure gender perception differences regarding relationships. Thus, this study examines expected and not expected gender behaviors through the following hypotheses:

Realism Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Characters will seem more real when they exhibit expected gender behavior, compared to unexpected gender behavior.

Casual Sex Hypothesis

Hypothesis 2: Female characters engaging in casual sex will receive lower approval ratings than male characters engaging in casual sex.

Dissatisfaction Complaints Hypothesis

Hypothesis 3: Women participants will have higher approval ratings of characters who criticize their partner with female stereotypical complaints. Male participants will have

higher approval ratings of characters who criticize their partner with male stereotypical complaints.

Behavior in Disagreements Hypotheses

Hypothesis 4: Male participants will have lower approval ratings than female participants of characters who engage in verbal disagreements with their partner.

Characteristics Desired in a Date or Spouse Hypotheses

Hypothesis 5: Participants will have higher approval ratings for characters who exhibit the participant's gender's expected gender behavior. Female participants will have higher approval ratings for characters who value the same traits in both a date and a spouse, and male participants will have higher approval ratings for characters that value different traits in a date compared to a spouse.

Methods

Participants.

All 64 participants were male and female undergraduates attending Cornell University. Participants ranged in ages from 18 to 22. Sixty-three participants were white, and one was black. Participants were recruited from Communication courses at Cornell University, as well as from Cornell Community Centers. Extra credit at the discretion of the course instructor was available to students in Communication courses offering extra credit.

Procedure.

After understanding and signing the University Committee on Human Subjects consent form, each participant was asked to read four stories similar to typical prime time television depictions of relationships. Each participant read all four stories. Given that people often watch multiple television shows in one sitting, reading multiple stories in one session should not affect reactions. The stories were presented on hardcopy paper. Instructions were written on the first page of the hardcopy paper. Directions instructed participants to read a story and, when finished, answer questions about the story they just read. Each participant read one story from each of the four versions, which were: (1) male expected and female expected, (2) male unexpected and female unexpected, (3) male expected and female unexpected and (4) female expected and male unexpected.

Each participant was randomly assigned to read either stories about white characters or stories about black characters. Order effects were controlled using a Latin Square Design. Eight different orders were used. After each story, six statements regarding approval, perceived realism, and interest were presented to the participant. Each statement was answered on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from one being “strongly disagree” to seven being “strongly agree.” Each story’s length was less than half of one page in size 12 font. On average, reading all four stories and answering the accompanying statements took participants 10 to 15 minutes.

After the participant read all four stories and answered the statements for each story, the participant was debriefed. The experimenter told the participant that the stories (s)he just read were not real television shows, but fictional stories generated by the

experimenter. The participant was told the purpose of the experiment, and any questions from the participant were answered.

Measures.

The participant was asked to respond to six statements after each story. Each statement was answered on a scale from one to seven, where one indicates “strongly disagree” and seven indicates “strongly agree”. The six statements are:

1. I approve of [female character's] behavior.
2. [Female character's] behavior was unrealistic.
3. I approve of [male character's] behavior.
4. [Male character's] behavior was not realistic.
5. The story was not realistic.
6. I would be interested in watching this television episode.

Other than the names of the male and female characters, which were inserted into the statements to match the story, all six questions were identical for each story.

Questions one and three measure approval; two, four, and five measure perceived realism; six measures interest. Age and race of the participants was recorded for demographic purposes.

Independent variables.

The four story situations

Four story lines were developed to measure gender differences regarding casual sex and aspects of romantic relationships. In some versions of the stories, sex is mentioned. However, no pornographic details are given and the stories do not contain explicit sexual behavior. The material is no more explicit than a PG-13 rating allows in a

film. All stories are fictional and generated by the experimenter. The four aspects examined are: attitudes regarding casual sex, dissatisfaction complaints in a relationship, behavior exhibited in disagreements with one's partner, and characteristics desired in a date compared to a spouse.

Story One: Attitudes towards casual sex. The story describes Ethan and Carrie who meet, go on a date, and then after the date, address whether or not one or both of them wants to have sex.

Story Two: Dissatisfaction complaints in a relationship. The episode describes Tom and Sue, a married couple, quarreling as they discuss signing divorce papers. In the story, the person names his/her complaints against his/her partner.

Story Three: Behavior exhibited in disagreements with one's partner. The story describes a couple, Margaret and Bill, driving to spend Christmas with their parents. There has been very heavy traffic and lengthy delays. One wishes that they had flown instead of driven, while the other is glad they drove despite the traffic inconveniences.

Story Four: Characteristics desired in a date compared to a spouse. Sarah and Dave are dating, and they question whether or not they should marry when Dave suddenly needs to move to a new city for his job.

Each of the four story lines discussed above had four different possible events: (1) the male and female characters both behave in gender expected behaviors. (2) Neither the male nor the female character engages in expected gender behaviors. (3) The male character's behavior is expected, while the female's behavior is unexpected. (4) Female character behaves in gender expected behaviors, while the male character does not. Thus, each story has four possible events, totaling four stories. Each story is shown with both

white and black characters, for a total of eight stories. The changes for the eight stories are discussed above.

How expectation was manipulated

Story One: Attitudes towards casual sex. The episode was developed based on research that says, “Males found it easier to participate in sexual intercourse without an emotional commitment whereas females were unlikely to want intercourse for physical pleasure in the absence of psychological involvement (Carroll, 1985). Four items in the story were altered to differentiate the four versions. The first item was the decision to sleep together without an emotional relationship. Since having sex without an emotional commitment is unexpected gender behavior for females and expected gender behavior for males, the female characters engaging in expected gender behavior and the male exhibiting unexpected gender behavior told the date that they “wanted to first develop an emotional relationship before anything physical happens.” For unexpected female behavior, and expected male behavior, the character was willing to have sex on the first date, without any emotional relationship. Three items emphasizing this point were added. The partner either “understood, but felt differently” or “felt the same way” about having casual sex, and the story concluding with the character “reluctantly just talking” to his/her date, “happily just talking” to his/her date, or having “happily slept” together.

Story Two: Dissatisfaction complaints in a relationship. Complaints are connected to expected gender complaints, so the complaint was either typical or atypical to the gender of the person. This television episode story was based on research that says, “[Men and women] differ in the way they explain their dissatisfaction. Women most often complain about their partners personality and his reluctance to be a financial

provider, whereas men most often complain they are disappointed in their partner's physical appearance and consequently lose sexual interest" (Yulia, 2002).

Three types of complaints could be expressed in the story: dissatisfaction with partner's personality, dissatisfaction with partner's reluctance to be a financial provider, and dissatisfaction with partner's appearance. Following Yulia's research, dissatisfaction with partner's personality was presented as female expected and male unexpected gender behavior. Expressing dissatisfaction with partner's reluctance to be a financial provider was in the version for female expected and male unexpected gender behavior, and dissatisfaction with partner's appearance was shown as male expected and female unexpected behavior.

Story Three: Behavior exhibited in disagreements with one's partner. Verbal disagreement versus silent dissention varies between the versions. This episode is based on Bushman's research concluding that, "males significantly more than females believe that disagreement is destructive" during conflicts (1999). Following Bushman's research, initiating verbal disagreement and responding verbally to a disagreement was shown in the version with female expected and male unexpected behavior. Silently disagreeing with partner without initiating verbally or responding to partner's verbal disagreements was shown in version with female unexpected and male unexpected gender behavior.

Story Four: Characteristics desired in a date compared to a spouse. This story was based on research that "the characteristics needed from a spouse compared to a date differ between men and women. Women [seek] similar characteristics for both a husband and a date. In contrast, men view characteristics for a date compared to a wife very differently. A date is seen as a combination of a nurturing object and a sex object" (Basu,

2000). In the differing versions, the male reaches one of two conclusions: (1) he should marry his girlfriend since he wants the same qualities in a girlfriend he wants in a wife (gender unexpected behavior), or (2) he should not marry his girlfriend because she's a great girl to date, but doesn't have the qualities he would want in a wife (gender expected behavior.) The female reaches one of two conclusions as well: (1) she should marry her boyfriend since she wants the same qualities in a boyfriend she wants in a husband (gender expected behavior), or (2) she should not marry her boyfriend because he's a great guy to date, but doesn't have the qualities she would want in a husband (gender unexpected behavior).

How race was manipulated

Each of the four stories described above was presented with either white characters or black characters. To indicate race, African-American names were used in the versions with black characters. Carrie and Ethan changed to LaTaya and Kwame; Tom and Sue to Germaine and Keisha; Margaret and Bill to Sharmaine and Daunte; Dave and Sarah to Tyronn and Akilah. Outside of names, all other aspects were constant between the white character and black character versions.

Dependent variables.

From the four stories addressing aspects of romantic and sexual relationships, three variables were examined: participants' approval of the characters' behavior, perceived realism of characters and story, and interest in the story. Differences between gender and race were studied. Race differences were measured between subjects, perceived realism and approval of character behavior within subjects. The questions one and three, "I approve of [female character's] behavior," and "I approve of [male

character's] behavior" measure approval of characters' behavior. Questions two, four, and five "[Female character's] behavior was unrealistic, [Male character's] behavior was not realistic, and the story was not realistic" measure perceived realism. Question six which says "I would be interested in watching this television episode" measures interest

Results

How results were analyzed

Data was entered for each participant into SPSS 14.0. The data was entered twice and compared to guard against data entry error. Each participant's gender, race, and twenty four responses to the story's questions were recorded. Race was analyzed between subjects, while gender approval, realism, and story interest was compared within subjects. Some of the questions were reverse coded, so those questions were reversed for analysis. Except where noted otherwise each dependent variable was analyzed using 4 (story expectation versions) x 2 (race) x 2 (participant sex) mixed design analysis. Story version was within subjects. The other variables were between subjects. The participants' answers for realism, approval, and story interest questions were compared across stories. The results for approval, realism, and story interest ratings were compared between the participants who read the stories with black characters and those who read stories with white characters.

Female Behavior Approval

The results for female character approval ratings were $F(3,186) = 5.5, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$. There was a main effect for the female character's approval ratings, male expected (me) and female not expected (fn) received the lowest approval rating ($M = 3.4$). While female participants approved of both the white female character ($M = 4.0$) and the black

female character's behavior ($M=4.0$) very similarly, male participants had a much lower approval of the black female characters ($M=3.6$) compared to the white female characters ($M=4.4$).

Between genders, both male ($M=4.4$) and female ($M=4.0$) participants had similar approval ratings of white female characters. Female participants had almost identical ratings of the white female characters ($M=4.0$) compared to the black female characters ($M=4.0$). However, male participants had lower approval ratings of black female characters ($M=3.6$) in comparison to white female characters ($M=4.0$).

Male Behavior Approval

Both genders had very similar approval ratings of male's behavior. For male expected behavior paired with unexpected female behavior, male participants gave similar ratings ($M=4.4$), as the female participants did ($M=4.0$). Pairing female unexpected behavior with male unexpected behavior, male participants once again rated male behavior approval ($M=4.4$) very similarly to how the female participants rated ($M=4.3$). The same with mn and fe behavior, where female participants $M=4.6$ and male participants $M=4.4$. Both genders had the lowest approval rating of the male's behavior when the male behaved expectedly and the female behaved unexpectedly ($M=3.6$ for male participants, $M=3.9$ for female participants).

Female participants had a small difference in approval ratings for both black male ($M=4.1$) and white male ($M=4.5$) characters. Male participants had similar results, with $M=4.4$ for white male character approval, and $M=4.0$ for black males.

When comparing the results for approval for male's behavior when the male character was black compared to white, the white male's behavior was found more

acceptable overall, regardless of which behavior was taken. White male's approval was $M = 4.4$ compared to black male's approval at $M = 4.0$.

Female Perceived Realism

Female expected behavior was perceived as the most real in all scenarios regardless of whether the male character was behaving expectedly or not expectedly. In the me and fe $M = 5.8$, and in the mn and fe $M = 5.3$. Female not expected behavior was rated as the most unrealistic in all scenarios, with fn and me $M = 3.1$ and fn and mn $M = 3.1$. Both male and female participants had similar ratings of female perceived realism. Males rated white females $M=4.3$ and black female $M=4.5$, and Females rated white females $M=4.4$ and black female $M=4.1$.

In the case of female perceived realism, story made a large difference. When both the female's and the male's behavior was unexpected, the female's perceived realism was $M=3.2$, compared to $M=5.8$ when both the male and female behaved expectedly. Race did not seem to impact the female's realism, except for when both the male and female were acting unrealistically. Then, the white female's rating was much lower ($M=2.8$) than the black female's ($M=3.6$).

Male Perceived Realism

Gender perception differences were the most notable in the different ways male and female participants perceived white versus black male characters. Female participants perceived black male character's realism lower ($M=3.9$) than male participants ($M=4.6$).

Male perceived realism had a large interaction effect, but no main effect of race. Male expected behavior was perceived as more real, and male not expected behavior was

perceived as less real. For male expected paired with female expected $M = 5.3$, mn and fn $M = 3.3$, me and fn $M = 5.5$, and for mn and fe $M = 2.4$. Male Participants viewed the white male character's behavior ($M=3.9$) as less realistic than the black male's character ($M=4.6$).

Story had strong results for male perceived realism. When the male acted unexpectedly, but the female acted as expected, the male was perceived much less real ($M=2.3$) than when both characters acted expectedly ($M=5.3$), or the male acted expectedly but the female did not ($M=6.0$).

Story Perceived Realism

Expected female behavior with unexpected male behavior was viewed as the most unrealistic ($M = 3.3$). When both characters behaved unexpectedly (mn and fn), the story seemed more realistic for black characters ($m = 4.2$) than for white characters ($M = 4.2$).

The largest gender difference in perceived realism of the story was the difference between how females judged the stories with black versus white characters, compared to how males judged them. Females judged the stories with white characters ($M=4.3$) to be just as real as the stories with black characters ($M=4.3$). However, male participants viewed the stories with white characters to be less real ($M=4.0$) compared to stories with black characters ($M=4.5$).

Interest in Story

The participants rated higher interest in the stories with white characters ($M = 4.1$) compared to the stories with black characters ($M = 3.3$). For the stories with white characters, Male not expected (mn) and female expected (fe) received the highest interest ratings ($M = 4.5$), followed by mn and fn ($M = 4.3$), and then me and fn ($M = 4.0$). Me

and fe received the lowest interest rating ($M=3.8$). For the stories with black characters, mn and fn had the highest approval rating ($M=3.5$), followed by mn and fe ($M=3.4$), then me and fe ($M=3.2$), and lastly me and fn ($M=3.1$).

Between the genders, both men and women had higher interest in the stories with white characters compared to black characters. For women, interest in the story with white characters was $M=3.9$, whereas only $M=3.2$ for black characters. For male participants, interest in stories with white characters was $M=4.4$, but plummeted to $M=3.5$ for stories with black characters. When stories were separated for a second analysis, all four stories consistently experienced lower interest ratings for the stories involving black characters compared to white characters.

Approval and Realism Differences between Plots

While each story examined an expected gender behavior, it is possible that some expected gender behaviors would have stronger results for approval than others. This analysis was added after considering that certain gender behavior violations may elicit stronger reactions. The four gender behavior differences, which are attitudes regarding casual sex, dissatisfaction complaints in a relationship, behavior in disagreements with partner, and characteristics desired in a date compared to a spouse, were analyzed separately. To analyze each gender behavior item, the each story was separated and analyzed individually, as well as compared to the other three stories.

Story One: Casual Sex

Approval of the female character's behavior was drastically different across the versions of Story One. For the two versions where the female character behaved expectedly and did not have casual sex, me and fe, and mn and fe, her approval was $M =$

5.1 and $M = 6.4$ respectively. However, when the female character engaged in casual sex, defying expected gender behavior (me and fn), her approval rating plummeted to $M = 2.3$. Men's approval ratings experienced much less radical results, with $M = 3.8$ when they did engage in casual sex, and $M = 4.4$, $M = 3.8$ when they did not.

The participants also judged blacks as more realistic to engage in casual sex than whites. When the female engaged in casual sex in versions two and three (fn and mn, and fn and me) $M = 2.0$ and $M = 2.3$ for the white female. On the other hand, when the black female engaged in casual sex in versions two and three, $M = 5.9$ and $M = 4.8$.

Male approval found similar results to the female realism results. Following Hypothesis 1's predictions, male behavior was rated less realistic when engaging in not unexpected gender behavior ($M = 3.9$), compared to when engaging in expected gender behavior ($M = 6.0$). In terms of overall story realism, participants judged Story One as much more realistic when both characters acted according to expected gender behavior ($M = 5.5$), than when they violated expected gender behavior ($M = 4.0$). This difference was significantly more pronounced between races than overall. For the story with white characters, expected gender behavior was seen as much more real ($M = 5.6$) than unexpected gender behavior ($M = 2.1$). On the other hand, the story with black characters was rated with similar perceptions of realism whether the characters behaved expectedly ($M = 5.4$) or unexpectedly ($M = 5.9$).

Story Two: Dissatisfaction Complaints in a Relationship

The strongest difference was between white and black characters' approval ratings when the male acted unexpectedly, but the female acted expectedly. The female

character's approval rating in this mn and fe situation was $M=4.8$ for white female characters, but the rating was much lower for black female characters ($M=3.80$)

According to Hypothesis 1, characters will seem more real when they exhibit expected gender behavior. This was indeed the case in Story Two. When both characters behaved unexpectedly, the female was rated less realistic ($M=2.9$) than when both characters behaved expectedly ($M=6.0$). Male's realism experienced contrary results to female's approval in Story Two. Going against Hypothesis 1, males received very low approval when they acted against expected gender behavior ($M=1.9$), and higher approval ratings when they disobeyed expected gender behavior conventions ($M=4.6$). In regards to over all story realism, participants judged Story Two as much more realistic when both characters acted according to expected gender behavior ($M=5.7$), than when they violated expected gender behavior ($M=3.0$).

Story Three: Behavior in Disagreements with Partner

For disagreements with partner, the condition where both characters acted unexpectedly had the highest approval ratings for the female's behavior. This is very surprising. In the white character scenario, female approval rating was $M=6.4$ for mn and fn, and for the black character scenario, $M=5.6$. According to Hypothesis 3, participants should have judged the characters more favorably when they followed gender stereotypes. However, the opposite occurred in this situation. Instead, the female character was rated the most favorably in both race situations where the characters swapped expected gender behaviors.

Female realism was once again found to be predictable based on expected/not expected gender behavior. When the female behaved according to expected gender

behavior, she was rated much more real ($M=6.1$) than when she acted against expected gender behavior ($M=2.8$). Male realism followed a similar pattern to female realism for Story Three. When the male behaved according to expected gender behavior, he was rated much more real ($M=6.0$) than when he acted against expected gender behavior ($M=3.2$). For story realism, participants judged Story Three as much more realistic when both characters acted according to expected gender behavior ($M=5.8$), than when they violated expected gender behavior ($M=4.2$).

Story Four: Characteristics Desired in a Date Compared to a Spouse

Female approval ratings for Story Four had no significant differences between the stories. In terms of female realism, again female character's behavior was found to be predictable based on expected/not expected gender behavior. When the female behaved according to expected gender behavior, she was rated much more real ($M=5.6$) than when she acted against expected gender behavior ($M=2.9$). Male approval differences for Story Four did not experience very much variety. Whether the male behaved expectedly ($M=4.7$) or unexpectedly ($M=4.3$), only slight approval variations occurred.

For general story realism, participants judged Story Four as more realistic when both characters acted according to expected gender behavior ($M=4.8$), than when they violated expected gender behavior ($M=3.9$). Between races this differences was more noticeable. For the story with white characters, expected gender behavior was seen as much more real ($M=4.3$) than unexpected gender behavior ($M=2.3$). On the other hand, the story with black characters was rated with similar perceptions of realism whether the characters behaved expectedly ($M=5.1$) or unexpectedly ($M=5.5$)

Discussion

Data from the story on casual sex supported Hypothesis 2, which stated that women engaging in casual sex will receive lower approval ratings than men engaging in casual sex. In the story dealing with casual sex, the female character's approval rating plummeted when she engaged in casual sex ($M=2.3$) compared to when she refrained ($M=4.4$ and $M=3.8$). The male character's approval ratings were comparable whether he engaged in casual sex ($M=3.8$), or did not ($M=3.8$ and $M=4.4$). This supports the research indicating that women experience greater pressures to not engage in casual sex, and thus, become less likely and less approving to engage in casual sex. Women reported greater disapproval of casual sex from their parents than men did, as well as less approval from their peers as men did (Daniels, 2002). Both parent and peer relationships, two of the four factors influencing romantic beliefs (Furmon & Simon 1999) apply different standards toward women than men. Additionally, media portrayals and cultural attitudes find casual sex more acceptable for men and women. Given the different influencing attitudes applied to women compared to their male counterparts, it's reasonable that women have lower approval of casual sex than men (Daniels, 2002). Thus, it follows that women's approval ratings of female characters that have casual sex would be lower than approval ratings of men having casual sex.

Data was also present that supports Hypothesis 1: Characters will seem more real when they exhibit expected gender behavior, compared to unexpected gender behavior. When the female character behaved unexpectedly accompanied with the unexpected male behavior, the female's perceived realism was $M=3.2$, compared to $M=5.8$ when both the

male and female behaved expectedly. The male character's realism dropped to $M=2.4$ when he behaved unexpectedly, compared to $M=5.3$ when the male behaved expectedly.

Male participants would at times have different approval ratings of character behavior compared to female participants. Female participants' approval ratings for black males was $M=4.1$ compared to $M=4.5$ for white males, and male participants rated white males at $M=4.4$ compared to black males' approval at $M=4.0$.

However, in terms of realism, there was a large gender difference between how male and female participants perceived the different races. Male participants found stories with black males more real ($M=4.5$) than stories with white males ($M=4.0$), but females rated black and white male realism as exactly the same ($M=4.3$ for both). This may be due to genres of television that males view. Women are very familiar with prime time television dramas, such as the stories in the experiment. However, men rarely watch such shows. Perhaps when the males read the stories, they were unable to identify with the white males since they are not accustomed to melodrama. However, in the stories with the black males, they may have viewed this as another culture, and as such, rated it more real because they are not familiar with that culture. The majority of the subjects were white (all but one), and since black characters were the unknown background, the subjects may have rated the black characters behavior as more real, regardless of the story or behavior itself, simply because they could not identify with melodramas and viewed being black as a different background. According to Shapiro and Chock, what is unknown is seen as more real (2004). Thus, since the participants are from a white background, they are more likely to find the "unknown" real when the characters are black since this is an unknown group.

Male's realism experienced contrary results to female's approval in Story Two. Going against Hypothesis 1, males experienced very low approval when they acted against expected gender behavior ($M=1.9$), and higher approval ratings when they disobeyed expected gender behavior conventions ($M=4.6$). This may be due to the specific nature of Story Two. In Story Two, expected gender behavior for males involves criticizing partner's physical attractiveness, whereas unexpected gender behavior for males in Story Two involves expressing disdain at partner's lack of ability as a financial provider. Given that the majority of participants were females, they may have found the expected gender behavior insults particularly offensive, and rated these insults as low. In comparison, when the male acted unexpectedly and accused his partner of complaints that females typically lodge, the participants viewed this behavior with much higher approval. This might be due to the fact that the majority of participants, females, are more accustomed to citing these complaints, and thus rate these complaints with higher approval.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Experiment

For my study, I assumed that expected gender behavior would be uniform in all four scenarios. This may have been a problematic assumption because, as the results reflect, some gender expected behaviors are rated stronger than others. Specifically, female characters who engaged in casual sex experience much lower approval ratings ($M=2.3$), compared to other unexpected gender behaviors, such as when the female character expressed dissatisfaction with partner's appearance ($M=3.0$). Because of differences between the stories, each of the four stories were run separately and compared.

The written story format for the television episodes worked well. I was able to specifically manipulate variables much more clearly than I would have been able to if I had relied on film clips or other media. Changing the names of the characters to popular African-American names successfully indicated to the reader that those characters were black. A pretest showed that popular African-American names are easily recognized as distinctly African-American. Feedback from a pre-test indicated that participants readily recognized individuals with the chosen African-American names as black.

Importance of Research

This study found that characters who violate expected gender behavior are seen as less real, and the behavior less acceptable. This has important implications regarding stereotypical gender behavior. Specifically, when a women engages in the same behavior as a man (or vice versa), participants readily recognize this behavior as unusual, and more importantly, have much lower approval of such behavior. The results regarding casual sex are particularly interesting. While some stereotypical gender behavior has only moderate differences between genders, female characters are judged very harshly for defying gender stereotypes and engaging in casual sex. This implies that there is a very strong gender expectation with regards to females not engaging in casual sex. Given that relationships form an integral part of every individual's life, developing deeper understanding of expected gender roles and behaviors in relationships can lead to insight about expectations and subsequent approval of partner's behavior in a relationship.

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